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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Brrrrr!! As I’m writing this at 1:00 in the afternoon, it’s 19 degrees outside! Was I really playing golf this time last week?!? Yes, I know that I did. I guess winter had to finally show its face around here, eventually. We even got some snow squalls here this morning to remind us, if the cold temps didn’t convince us. Most of our holiday decorations are up, and my wife has the tree up and decorated. I’ve spent some time doing some holiday shopping, and trying to get that completed early for a change. I’m hoping to have the bulk of it done by this weekend.

It’s been an interesting week in the Atari newsgroups - a number of interesting discussions and announcements. We’ve included a number of these in this week’s issue, with more to follow over the next few weeks. It’s really nice to see continued interest in our favorite computers, both in use and new innovations. Just when you think things have come to standstill, things start to pick up. That’s always great to see!

So, while I continue to contemplate my holiday shopping list and get better prepared to endure the dropping temperatures, I’ll leave you to enjoy the rest of this week’s issue.

Until next time...

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MacAranym -- ATARI / OSX

Hi,

The <http://eureka.atari.org/MacAranym.zip> configuration was updated. ARAnyM means "ATARI Running on Any Machine" <http://aranym.org/> is the Virtual Machine that also runs hosted by MacOSX.

ARAnyM is GNU/GPL. The package built by myself is ready to launch.

The version is "Universal Binary". The performances are the same on

PPC and Intel machines.

MacAranym was updated with a 0.9.4beta2 and a recent and 040 optimized version of the fVDI graphic driver. Redraws will be faster.

Enjoy it :)

Best ATARIan regards,

-- François Le Coat
Author of Eureka 2.12 (2D Graph Describer, 3D Modeller)
<http://eureka.atari.org/>

KEEPTIME v1.0 System Patch for Dead Real Time Clock

KEEPTIME v1.0 is a patch to disable a system time reset when the battery of your RTC is dead. This text has been written for the Atari Falcon. It may be applied to Falcon, TT and compatibles.

The Problems

"My Falcon lost the time and date when I switch off."
(15/31/07 0:00 for each boot)
"My Falcon boots in low resolution."
"My TOS is always in English and the keyboard is Qwerty."

The Explanation

Whenever you are shutting down your Falcon, the time, the date and NVRAM settings are saved into the RTC chip (Real Time Clock).
The Real Time Clock can also be named ’CMOS Clock’ or ’CMOS Battery’.
The RTC contains a 128 bytes memory to save setup information.
The approximate life length of this chip is about 10-12 years because the RTC contains a built-in battery. The Falcon is not a very young machine, so the battery of your RTC is now dead !!

This chip soldered on the Falcon motherboard (U64) is a Dallas DS1287. It can be replaced by unsoldering with the same chip or equivalent (ST MK48T87B-24, MC146818A, MCCS146818BM) . The Dallas DS1287 is, in fact, a DS1285 which a lithium battery has been included in the same block. So you can also break the shell of the RTC to find the built-in battery. Then, you must disconnect the circuit of the battery and redirect it to a new external battery added. You can find info about this process on Atari forums on the web or inside ST Magazine.(issue 141)

Unfortunately, you don’t want to open your Falcon and replace the RTC chip because you think you are not able to do this !

The Solution

First of all, a good solution is to launch the classic accessory Control

Panel to set the time and date for each boot of the machine.

Yes, it’s a safe solution but there is a problem !

If you are using TOS or MagiC operating systems, when you quit a program, a time and date reset occurs ! No problem, if you are using Mint OS. I think it is a little bit irritating to work with that!

It is due to the specific XBIOS Function Gettime(). This same function can be found on TOS versions 3.xx (TT) and 4.xx (Falcon).

This function is called by the system when you return to desktop after closing an application.(I don’t know why...)

The Gettime() function has a special behavior when it finds that the battery of the RTC is dead, this function simply resets the time and date! The dead battery information is sent by the RTC itself.

KEEPTIME is a patch to disable in TOS the time reset by Gettime() function if the battery of your RTC is dead.

http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/keeptime/v1.0/

You must run it in the AUTO folder.

Caution: To take effect, the TOS must be found in RAM !
Basically, the Falcon works with the TOS located in ROM.
Therefore, the TOS in ROM must be copied in RAM.

So you can use the excellent free tool by Uwe Seimet called ROMSPEED:
http://www.seimet.de/files/atari/romspd31.zip
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/keeptime/v1.0/romspd31/
You have just to run ROMSPEED.PRG in the AUTO folder before KEEPTIME.PRG. In this case, you must know that the MMU is used by ROMSPEED to remap TOS in memory. KEEPTIME takes into account this functionality to locate the TOS.

Under MagiC operating system, the same function Gettime() as the TOS is present. However, you don’t need to run ROMSPEED because MagiC is already loaded in RAM.

Copy in this order ROMSPEED.PRG and then KEEPTIME.PRG in your AUTO folder (Generally C:AUTO). Be sure that your XCONTROL.ACC file is present in the root directory. (Or any kind of another tool to set time and date)

"Thanks, time and date reset has been disabled as long as my Falcon is powered on, but I’m still booting in low resolution with wrong keyboard configuration..."

Yes, it remains the NVRAM configuration problem.
You can find different tools to set up keyboard, TOS language, etc.
But you can only reboot your Falcon if you want that parameters take effect.

I have selected NVRam by Centek:
http://centek.free.fr/atari/softs/nvram.zip
http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/keeptime/v1.0/nvram/
With this tool you can, of course, configure the NVRAM (into the RTC chip). In addition, you can write a bootable program on a floppy disk which writes your selected configuration into NVRAM chip for every

Falcon boot. Be sure that your floppy disk is present in the drive of course !

Follow this process to create a bootable floppy disk with NVRam:
- Run NVRAM.APP from the desktop.
- Set keyboard and TOS language, time format, boot resolution, ...
- Click on the floppy disk icon and insert a floppy disk in drive A.
- Click on the left icon (NVRAM -> Floppy Disk) in the new window opened. The program quickly writes the boot sector program on the disk with your NVRAM Settings.
- Then quit NVRam application. Your floppy disk is good.
(If you click on the NVRAM icon for quit, the settings are saved on NVRAM chip, but to take effect you must reboot. So, you can perform infinite reboots with your good parameters until you switch off your Falcon.)

At each boot, NVRam bootable program looks for if it has been already installed in memory. In the case of NVRam already installed, the NVRAM config is not written.

So be careful when you have just switched off your Falcon, the memory and the RTC are not cleared instantly because it may remains residual current in the components. I advise to wait a long minute.

The End

Here is my summary procedure to work with a dead RTC battery:
- Switch on the Falcon with the correct floppy disk in drive.
- Very quickly, the floppy disk boot program will be read (You can read on the screen NVRam flag) and a system reset will occur.
- Now your Falcon boots with the correct NVRAM settings.
- After comes ROMSPEED and KEEPTIME loading.
- On the desktop, it remains to set the correct time and date in the Control Panel.
- That’s all! Good Luck!

Yvan Doyeux

Dallas Semiconductors Maxim : http://www.maxim-ic.com/
ST Magazine : http://stmagazine.org/

URL: http://doyeuxyvan.free.fr/keeptime/v1.0/

PhantomS - Reincarnation of Phantom Accelerator for Falcon

Kevin Savetz

Petr Svoboda has announced:

I overtook production of Phantom accelerator. PhantomS is modernized reincarnation of the popular Phantom. It boosts the system frequency (BUS, CPU, FPU) from 16 to 25MHz -> raw power gain is 56%. DSP and some FPUs can be overclocked to 50MHz.

PhantomS is perfect supplement to CT63, as CT63 doesn’t boost the

mainboard.

The price is 35EUR, and first pieces are ready.

More information and contact on website.

URL: http://www.volny.cz/boban07/PhantomS/

Analogue Controller Technology Development

For those who do not frequent Atari Age I have announced the technology development (not production) of a new Bankswitching analogue controller for the Jaguar based on a converted PlayStation controller, as the STE and Falcon have compatible enhanced joystick ports. I thought some of the folks here may also find it of interest.

You can find the topic at

http://www.atariage.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=98138

or go directly to the webpage at

http://sgmelectrosoft.co.uk/hardware/gamepad.htm

for more information and a draft technical reference.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we're 'enjoying' the first real cold snap of the season here in southern new england. Don't tell my wife, but this is my favorite time of year. The cold air never fails to wake me up just a little bit more than usual.

My wife, on the other hand, prefers warmth and warm fuzzies. The cold air is something to be avoided, the early darkness of the days before the winter solstice to be cursed at. The only actual joy she finds in this time of year is decorating the house and buying gifts for Christmas.

Hey, it keeps her out of my hair, right? [grin]

I'm a little short on dialogue this week. I know, I know, you're all upset about that, right? Well, what can I say? Everyone hits a dry spell every now and again.

So how about I stop somewhere right around here and let you peruse the messages from the UseNet. Deal? Deal.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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’Mark’ asks about his Falcon’s problems with a CD-ROM and network card:

"On my Falcon I’ve a SCSI/Link-3 (model DP0802) daynaport network adapter. Running with HDDRIVER 7.52, Sting 1.26 and the drivers from anodyne software (ver0.71)

Last week I attached a Yamaha scsi CD-ROM. I Use metados, with spin. I tried also the drivers for a Falcon. (Falcon.bos).

When I disconnect the daynaport, I get proper access to the CD -ROM. When I disconnect the CD-ROM, I can use without problems the dyanaport.

When they are all connected in a chain, the computer always crashes at start-up. I’ve tried a lot of combinations in my auto folder, but everything fails. Is this normal ?

The chain is as follows:
First Harddisk drive : scsi id 0, cd rom scsi id 1, syquest ezdrive scsi id 2, as last daynaport scsi id 3, with termination on. No IDE drive installed

I think the sting driver is conflicting with the metados. But I don’t know how to resolve it.

If somebody has the same problems, let me know please."

’Melloh’ asks Mark:

"Is SCSI arbitration turned on in HDriver software? Just a thought."

Mark replies:

"Yep, it is turned on.

Roger Burrows, the author of the ExtenDOS, told me :

| > When they are all connected in a chain, the computer always crash at start-up.
| > I’ve tried a lot of combinations in my auto folder, but everything fails. Is
| > this normal ?
|
| I don’t know if this is ’normal’, but unless spin uses the scsidrv interface,
| it’s not surprising. The Daynaport driver needs to talk to the SCSI bus from a
| timer interrupt and if there is other i/o going on, this will undoubtedly cause
| a crash of some kind. "

He’s a really good guy :) . always helpful.

I want to know if somebody uses the same set-up as me, with success."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells Mark:

"I think things are a bit more complicated. I am not sure anymore if SPIN! uses the XHDI interface to access devices, but I think so.

Provided that SPIN! exclusively uses XHDI calls and provided HDDRIVER 8 is used there should be no potential for a crash. HDDRIVER 8 (but not 7) routes all XHDI calls through the SCSIDRV layer, which effectively means that XHDI and SCSIDRV calls should not collide."

Mark tells Uwe:

"Thanks for the answer.

So, If I am right, when I upgrade to version 8 of HDDRIVER, al my problems should be solved?

When I first try the demo, and if it NOT work, can I easily downgrade to version 7.52 without losing my info on the scsi HD?"

Uwe replies:

"That's a question I cannot answer because there are so many software packages with low level device access involved. I can only say that with HDDRIVER 7 I am not surprised that there are problems, and that HDDRIVER 8 is prepared to solve them. Whether this works depends on the other software packages, though.

Yes, you can [easily downgrade], and this is the best way to test if anything changes with a current version of HDDRIVER. Just install the demo of HDDRIVER 8.1 available on http://www.seimet.de/hddriver_english.html. After running tests you can simply re-install HDDRIVER 7.52."

On the subject of an internal solid state hard drive for the ST, everyone's favorite techie, Alison, posts this:

"This is what I'm working on at the moment. All of the failsafe error checking and that stuff. It's being tested with no less that eight SD cards during development.

Regarding this hot-swapping HD. That's something I'm doing at the moment too. It won't be possible to hot-swap without a reset of the ST (or I don't think it will be). But it will be entirely possible to have a few cards at hand. The ST won't know!!

There will a 1Gb limit. This is after all a totally standard ACSI hard drive as far as the ST is concerned. That's been the purpose throughout, to present something to the ST that it doesn't see as non-standard. It's no good if it requires fiddly drivers.

When these things eventually ship they'll boot immediately as I'll supply them with a prepared card, likely 512MB depending on how much I can get them for. Also a standard wall-wart adapter will be required

to power it. It requires about 9VDC at 250mA tops.

EVERYTHING is being done by the book. There's no hacking of the ACSI port to soak its power supply from the data lines (that's possible!!) and the ACSI port will be buffered. Design corners can be cut but I don't want to. This may take a while longer.

http://www.logicsays.com/pub/WeST_v2.jpg "

'Jimmie' asks Alison:

"Any idea as to cost?"

Alison replies:

"Chris and I are talking about that at the moment. We're up to about in parts alone at cost price. The chip for example is a throw, running at 40MIPS. Being able to process at 25nS per instruction is essential in the handshaking of the ACSI port, the hardware simply times out if you don't respond within 250nS. nS=nanoSeconds."

Roger Burrows tells Alison:

"From a number of things you've said & I've spotted on the web, I'm guessing you're using a dsPIC33FJxxx device. If you're not, please ignore the following.

I checked my Digi-Key catalog & for qty 25, prices run from around $9.00 cdn to $23.00 cdn each, including shipping & taxes, depending on chip features. At current exchange rates, that's around 4 to 10 pounds each. Even if you're using the most expensive version, you still seem to be paying over the odds ..."

Chris jumps in and tells Roger:

"We haven't yet decided 100% on what device to use, digi-key do have good prices, though when you just want a couple of devices to try the local store has to do. If we buy 25 pcs sure price will be a lot lower. though we will have to have 25 payments upfront before we do that. chances are will have to buy just a couple at a time to save us from having lots of them until the end of time... it s never easy unfortunately."

Uwe Seimet tells Alison:

"You could have implemented an ICD-compatible adapter, without such a limit."

Alison replies:

"Oh I think I'll give up then.

It comes down to cost. Namely that I'm not spending hundreds of hours perfecting an addition to the working code. And that 21-bit numbers are

just about manageable on a 16-bit processor.

The SD cards have a physical limit of 4GB. They are also byte rather than block allocated. I can generate a 32-bit byte sector address from a 21-bit number in 100nS. If I was working with 32-bit block addresses, to convert them to 40-bit byte addresses would take significantly longer, which the SD card couldn't manage anyhow.

If someone was willing to pay - for the unit reflecting time and costs (I don't think they would) then I would build it. This has been debated recently on one of the other Atari forums where they're complaining how expensive hardware developments are for the ST. If they were selling by the 10,000 then yes, things would be cheaper. But we're producing for a specialist market. Software is relatively easy to produce as you're working within a fixed system and don't require lab test equipment costing 000, as in a 100Mhz logic analyzer, a digital storage oscilloscope etc. Hardware on the other hand is full of pitfalls. If you don't get it right electrically, then it doesn't matter if your code is the best code that was ever written.

And how many people produce Software for the ST? Very few. You're one of them so credit goes to you. But there are plenty of people that just like the idea of dreaming and talking about what could be done, citing end requirements without any consideration for how they're going to get there. There's a word for them; bullshit artists. This is the Internet, there's plenty to choose from. This is why I've been quiet for so long. I quietly sit back and do what I do. Anyone offering suggestions is a distraction from the task at hand.

Hardware has the potential to kill an ST outright. I simply don't have the time or money to absorb those costs.

If. If the ICD standard was open source and fully documented then maybe. But it isn't, so rather than spend hours performing R&D trying to reverse engineer an ICD interface (which I don't have, and is subject to copyright anyway), I do what I can. And I do it well. I may be able to implement the additional SCSI commands, but if I can't test them to the 9th degree then I can't sell something. I'd rather be making stuff that works and selling it, than clearing up behind myself in support because I-didn't-think-of-that.

I'm not in a position to test an ICD implementation for every eventuality. And users do eventually find out every eventuality and focus on it. WeST will work as it says it will on the box, and on that note I'll quietly disappear again and get on with it."

Chris adds:

"I think 1GB is plenty, I used my falcon everyday for years, took me several years to fill a 250MB hard drive. I mean ST programs are really small, most supplied on a couple of floppies tops, apart from mass storage does anyone actually use 1GB ?! 1GB of Atari programs is unthinkable, I think my C: drive only comes on about 20MB of programs... well that s just me anyways...."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, when I'll continue my stroll down memory lane and let you have a peek into the deep, dark recesses of my mind once again. [chuckle]

Until then, remember to keep your eyes on the horizon, your ear to the ground and your back to the wall, and always, always be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nintendo's Wii Hits Japan & Europe!
Wii Remote Safety Concerns!
More Families Play Games!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Nintendo's Wii Hits Japanese Stores

Nintendo's Wii video game system hit Japanese stores Saturday with long lineups and shortages, following its sellout U.S. launch last month.

More than 3,000 people braved frosty weather to line up at downtown Tokyo electronics retailer Bic Camera, hoping to get their hands on the console, said store spokeswoman Naoko Ito.

The store started turning people away at 5:40 a.m. local time, more than an hour before doors opened, and Wiis were sold out "for the foreseeable future," Ito said.

Earlier, crowd-control staff at the store, trying to avoid a stampede, used megaphones to urge shoppers to stop pushing.

Short supplies were reported elsewhere in the capital.

With the Wii, Kyoto-based Nintendo Co., which brought the world the mustachioed plumber Super Mario, and Game Boy hand-held game machines, hopes to challenge the dominance of Sony Corp. and Microsoft Corp. in the game console market.

Unlike its rivals' high-powered consoles, Nintendo's Wii puts simplicity above fancy graphics and computing horsepower.

Wii's remote-control wand can be swung like a tennis racket, fishing pole, or orchestra baton in easy-to-play games the company hopes will appeal to a wider audience than the traditional young male demographic.

That will be especially crucial in Japan, where a graying population has made the game industry's growth sluggish in recent years.

Wii has a price advantage at US$250, about half of PlayStation 3 at roughly US$500 or US$600, depending on the model.

The Xbox 360, which launched last year, sells for US$300 to US$400. Nintendo also has more machines for sale. Nearly 400,000 Wiis were available for the Japan launch date. U.S. shoppers snapped up more than 600,000 of its Wii video game systems in the week after its launch there on Nov. 19.

Sony had just 100,000 PS3s in Japan and 400,000 consoles in the U.S. when they debuted last month.

Production problems have pushed PlayStation's European launch back to March. Analysts expect Wii to mount a serious challenge to Sony's 70 percent market share, which it built with previous PlayStation consoles.

Sony has sold more than 200 million PlayStation series machines over the years. Nomura Securities Co. analyst Yuta Sakurai said last month he expected Nintendo to sell 40 million machines, compared with 70 million PlayStation 3 consoles in the next five years.

More critically, the profit is also likely to be better for Nintendo, while Sony is losing money for every PS3 console it sells until it gets a return on its huge investments.

Sony is expecting to rack up 200 billion yen (US$1.7 billion) in red ink in its game unit for the fiscal year ending March 2007, much of it in startup costs for PlayStation 3. By contrast, Nintendo is forecasting profit of 100 billion yen (US$845 million) for the fiscal year, as Wii buoys earnings in the second half.

Nintendo's Wii Premieres In Europe

The first of Europe's gamers got their hands on Nintendo's new video-game console on Friday after stores across the continent opened their doors at midnight to end die-hard fans' long wait for a Wii.

In Britain some fans camped out for over two nights on Oxford Street, London's main shopping drag, to guarantee bagging a Wii, the latest entrant in the $30 billion global video-game market.

"I can't believe it's real, I've been waiting for this for ages. said Marlon, after he became the first gamer in Britain to buy a Wii.

"It was definitely worth it, I'd do it again," he added after revealing he had queued for two days, including one which saw a tornado and torrential rain hit London.

The Wii has been making waves with usually cynical gamers even though its computing power is dwarfed by the Xbox 360 and the PS3, and it does not offer the lifelike, high-definition graphics its bigger rivals boast.

Players can thrust, wave, swing and twist its one-handed, motion-sensitive

controller to direct the on-screen action and simulate real life moves such as swinging a sword, hitting a tennis ball or shooting a bow and arrow.

Instead of trying to steal hard-core gamers from Sony and Microsoft which have already released the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 consoles, Nintendo hopes to expand the traditionally male video-game audience by luring new players with a different style of game playing.

It was that difference that was exciting most of those waiting in line. "I've heard so much about it and finally it's out in the UK" said Amid Hussein as he neared the front of the queue outside the HMV store.

"It's a different sort of gaming really, you're not just sitting there and just pushing buttons, you are actually getting into the game."

Nintendo's European marketing director Laurent Fischer told Reuters that the company had been keen to do something new.

"We wanted to step away from what is the current status in terms of innovation in video games."

"The area where there is a lot of freedom and a lot of creativity for developers is the interface (controller) and the way you play the game."

Fischer said the company was looking at a variety of motion-sensitive options, which would suit other games such as soccer games.

"Some of the different things (controllers) the developers have been coming up with are really amazing, they can put it (the technology) into almost anything," he added.

Nintendo has priced the basic Wii package at 180 pounds or $250, compared with $600 for the premium PS3 and $400 for the top-end Xbox 360.

Kyoto-based Nintendo Co. Ltd., which created video-game characters Super Mario and Donkey Kong, aims to ship 4 million Wii consoles globally by December 31, double the number of PS3s expected by year-end.

Nintendo's last console, the GameCube, sold 21 million units globally to land in third place, behind Sony's PlayStation 2 and Microsoft's Xbox.

The company recently had to issue some cautionary advice for Wii players, telling them to keep hold of console's motion-sensitive controller whatever they do after some gamers complained they had smashed televisions and appliances after losing their grip on it.

Fischer said players had clearly been a little over-enthusiastic. "When I saw some examples of what had happened, I think there is nothing we can do about it," he joked.

Nintendo Cautions Gamers On Wii Remote Safety

Nintendo Co. Ltd. has some cautionary advice for players of its Wii video game console: when waving the controller, use the wrist strap, keep your palms dry and, whatever you do, don't let go.

The Wii has been pitched as a cheap alternative to pricier machines from

Microsoft Corp. and Sony Corp., but some gamers complain they are facing unexpected costs after losing their grip on the console's remote control and smashing their televisions and other appliances.

Wii games are played with a motion-sensing controller that is waved, swung and twisted to direct the on-screen action.

Although the controller comes with a wrist strap, reports of damage caused by snapping straps have been cropping up on video game Web sites.

There is even one site, Wiihaveaproblem.com, dedicated to chronicling tales of Wii-related carnage. On Wednesday, the site's damage toll included reports of 13 broken straps, 7 televisions and 2 laptop computers.

In an e-mail sent to Wii customers and posted on various Web sites on Wednesday, Nintendo said extreme motion could snap the strap by causing players to lose their grip on the remote.

Copies of the e-mail were posted on sites such as Joystiq.com, and a company spokesman confirmed it was authentic.

"Hold the remote securely and avoid excessive motion during game play. If your hands become moist, stop and dry your hands," the company recommended.

Nintendo also cautioned players to stay at least 3 feet away from the TV and to make sure people and objects were safely outside their range of motion.

Last week, Nintendo America chief Reggie Fils-Aime told Reuters that many gamers were using big, sweeping motions where smaller ones would do.

"We literally have consumers letting go of the remote like you do a bowling ball. You can't do that!" Fils-Aime said of a bowling game in its "Wii Sports" title.

Nintendo also gives tips on safe gameplay on its Web site, at http://www.nintendo.com/consumer/wiisafety.jsp.

More Families Playing Video Games But Concerns Remain

A new generation of technologically savvy parents are turning gaming into a family event, according to a new survey, but critics pushing for greater monitoring of video game content remain concerned.

An online survey of 1,014 U.S. children and their parents, conducted by market researcher Harrison Group - and commissioned by U.S. game publisher Activision - found 58 percent of parents surveyed said they play video games and more than half this time is spent with their children.

The survey comes as a bitter political battle over violent content in video games shows some signs of cooling with two of the industry's fiercest critics, U.S. senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Joe Lieberman, due later Thursday to join forces with the industry's own rating board in a nationwide educational television campaign.

"We're really seeing an emerging generation of parents who are also

gamers," said Paul Lundquist, research expert with the Harrison Group. "For the most part these parents have been playing since they were teenagers themselves."

Game makers give special attention to "Nintendads" - a reference to popular game maker Nintendo - who are now making buying decisions and introducing their own kids to the games they grew up with.

The survey found 74 percent of parents are comfortable with video games becoming a part of their family life and most are familiar with an industry ratings system used to assess what age group should play certain games and used as a guide to the kind of content in the games, such as the levels of violence.

But David Walsh, president of the National Institute on Media and the Family, said the numbers did not represent parents in general as online surveys are more likely to be completed by people who are technologically inclined.

"There are clearly parents that do play games, but not at the numbers they were reporting," said Walsh, who advocates that a group from outside the industry be given the responsibility of rating games.

Virtually all video games sold through retail in the United States and Canada carry a rating assigned by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), a self-regulated group which reviews the games and assigns them an age group, such as "T" for teen and "M" for mature, or age 17 and up.

More than half of the parents involved in the survey said the ESRB rating was the biggest factor when deciding whether to buy a game for their child.

Last year’s controversy over undisclosed sexual content in the game "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" fueled the debate over regulation but the industry has stuck by its self-regulated stance.

Critics of violent game content cite numerous headline-grabbing behavioral and cognitive studies, which suggest a link between exposure to violent media and aggressive behavior. However, such studies often lack a control group or other research criteria required by the scientific community.

Courts have blocked efforts by several states to curb violent video game content and sales of violent games to minors, deeming them unconstitutional.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.N. Agency Sees Risks To Privacy, Security Online

Computer users who type in the same username and password for multiple sites - such as online banks, travel agencies and booksellers - are at serious risk from identity thieves, a United Nations agency said on Sunday.

The International Telecommunication Union, a Geneva-based U.N. branch, said businesses and regulators need to find a solution to the spread of personal information on the Internet, possibly by developing more streamlined identification methods.

At the moment, the ITU said the sheer number of identifiers and passwords required from computer users made it nearly inevitable that they repeat codes. "This may cause security breaches, and leave them vulnerable to the machinations of identity thieves ever increasing in number and inventiveness," it said in its 2006 Internet report, released ahead of a major meeting of governments and industry officials in Hong Kong.

"The lack of coordination in identification systems is a source of growing inconvenience to users and needs to be addressed rapidly," it said.

The agency also highlighted risks to privacy from widespread Internet use, especially from marketers tracking the preferences and traffic of browsers across a variety of sites.

If people have confidence in the way such information is stored and used, the ITU said there might be no problem from the proliferation of "cookies" and other data-capturing tools, often used for targeted online advertising.

But it warned that a breakdown in consumer trust could impede the future expansion of Internet-based commerce.

Spam Is Back With A Vengeance As Filters Lose Effectiveness

Most Internet users already know it: spam is on the rise again as the senders of unwanted e-mail advertisements find new ways to circumvent filtering systems.

A study released last month by the security firm Postini found that unwanted messages now account for 91 percent of all e-mail, and over the past 12 months the daily volume of spam rose by 120 percent.

A separate report by California-based IronPort Systems concluded that worldwide spam volumes increased from 31 billion messages daily in October 2005 to 61 billion messages per day in October 2006.

Security experts cite two key reasons for the surge, which has come after a brief respite in which spam appeared to be stabilizing.

First, spammers are using massive networks of hijacked computers called "bot-nets" to send the e-mails. Postini said more than one million infected computers are being used for spam and virus attacks each day, with 50,000 or more active at any instant.

Secondly, spammers are using more sophisticated techniques to get around filters, notably the use of "image spam."

"This dramatic rise in spam attacks on corporate networks has the Internet

under a state of siege," said Daniel Druker, executive vice president of marketing at Postini.

"Spammers are increasingly aggressive and sophisticated in their techniques, and protection from spam has become a front-burner issue again. Spam has evolved from a tool for nuisance hackers and annoying marketers to one for criminal enterprises."

Image spam reached a new high of 25 percent of total spam volume in October 2006, an increase of 421 percent in a year, according to IronPort.

Paul Judge, chief technology officer of Secure Computing Corp, said filters that use key text words, mathematical analysis or even optical recognition have become less effective against the newest spam.

"Spammers are using advanced mathematical and graphical techniques like random modification of image pixels and dynamic construction of images from multiple components to bypass spam filtering tools," he said.

Spam can reap profits for the senders in a variety of ways. The messages can simply offer a product for sale, such as Viagra or other pharmaceuticals; they can include fraudulent pitches for money or direct users to a fake "phishing" website to glean financial information or passwords; or they can include attachments that will infect computers, allowing them to be used to relay more spam.

Security group PandaLabs says a major new type of spam aims to push sales of stocks in a certain company.

"The objective of this attack is to push up these stock prices," PandaLabs said, saying the messages appear to be coordinated to boost a particular share price to make profits.

"It is more than likely that the creator of these messages has bought these stocks for cheap and aims to make a quick profit by pushing the value up," said Luis Corrons, director of PandaLabs.

"The greatest danger in these types of attacks is that just as they can push prices up a bit, they can also cause them to drop. This could become a dangerous tool if used, say, as a weapon against a group of investors or a specific company."

The latest developments dashed hopes for victory in the battle on spam. A US law known as the CAN-SPAM act of 2003 has only had a limited impact. A claim by Microsoft chairman Bill Gates in 2004 that the problem would be "under control within two years" also proved illusory.

California security firm McAfee said some spammers now use "island-hopping," directing messages from the domain names of small islands to disguise themselves from filters that traditionally catch more well-known domains.

McAfee traced spam activity from the Isle of Man to the tiny tropical island of Tokelau in the South Pacific.

Other areas whose domains are being used include Tuvalu, Tonga, and Sao Tome and Principe.

"This new trend is another example of spammers’ relentless quest to spread their abuse of Internet domains far and wide," said Guy Roberts, a McAfee

researcher. "Some of these islands have dozens of spammed domains per square mile."

MySpace To Offer Technology To Block Sex Offenders

News Corp.’s MySpace said on Tuesday it will offer in the next 30 days a technology to identify and block convicted sex offenders from the popular online social network.

The top online social network, which has a large following of teens attracted to its music and entertainment offerings, has also been used by adults seeking sex with underage Internet users.

The personal safety of its users while online and the protection of entertainment copyrights are viewed as two of the biggest threats to MySpace’s ability to make money in the future, analysts say.

MySpace said it has struck a deal with Sentinel Tech Holding Corp., an expert in background verification, to build the new feature.

The new technology, called Sentinel Safe, will let MySpace search state and federal databases to seek out and delete MySpace profiles of registered sex offenders. It will be available in the next 30 days.

"We are committed to keeping sex offenders off MySpace," the site’s chief security officer, Hemanshu Nigam, said in a statement.

Profiles of convicted sex offenders in the U.S. are added to a database available to authorities.

According to MySpace, there are 550,000 registered sex offenders in the United States. The company said the new service will be the first national database that brings together about 46 state sex offender registers.

Antispyware Company to Reimburse Some Customers

Washington’s attorney general has settled the first case prosecuted under the state’s 2005 Computer Spyware Act.

The settlement announced today is with antispyware vendor Secure Computer. The White Plains, New York, software company was accused of marketing its product via deceptive spam and pop-up ads, which offered free spyware scans that always detected a problem with the computer that was scanned.

The company and its president, Paul Burke, will pay $725,000 in legal fees and $200,000 in penalties, and will reimburse Washington state customers $75,000, said Paula Selis, senior council with the attorney general’s office. "Given the scope of the defendants’ practices and the amount of consumer harm out there, we feel this is a very fair settlement."

More than 1100 state residents purchased the company’s Spyware Cleaner software since it went on the market in 2004, Selis said. Those customers will now be e-mailed by Secure Computer and offered a refund for the $50 product, under terms of the settlement.

Secure Computer, which admits no wrongdoing in the matter, is also prohibited from using deceptive marketing techniques to promote its software, and the company must now review the advertising of its marketing affiliates to make sure they comply with the settlement.

That seems like an unlikely possibility, however, because Spyware Cleaner was pulled from the market shortly after the lawsuits were filed in late January, and Secure Computer is now out of business, according to the company's Web site.

Representatives from Secure Computer could not be reached for comment.

Secure Computer and four of its business partners were sued by Microsoft and the Washington attorney general in January, but charges against three of the men have already been settled. A fourth man, Manoj Kumar of Maharashtra, India, could not be located the attorney general's office said.

Aggressive MySpace Worm Attacks via QuickTime

The social networking site MySpace.com is under what one computer security analyst calls an "amazingly virulent" attack caused by a worm that steals log-in credentials and spreads spam that promotes adware sites.

The worm is infecting MySpace profiles with such efficiency that an informal scan of 150 found that close to a third were infected, said Christopher Boyd, security research manager at FaceTime Communications.

MySpace, owned by News Corp., is estimated to have at least 73 million registered users.

The worm works by using a cross-scripting weakness found around two weeks ago in MySpace and a feature within Apple's QuickTime multimedia player.

The exploit starts with a user who visits a MySpace profile infected with an embedded QuickTime movie. The movie loads JavaScript code that overlays a row of menu options on a MySpace profile with a bogus menu.

A QuickTime function, called the HREF track, can direct the player to use JavaScript commands to load Web pages into a browser frame or window.

The JavaScript feature in QuickTime has legitimate uses, "but there are a lot of legitimate uses for technology that can be misused," said Ross Paul, senior product manager with Websense.

If an option in the bogus menu is clicked, the user is directed to a fake log-in page hosted on another server where the person's log-in details are captured.

This phishing-style maneuver is similar to another recent attack aimed at MySpace users.

Websense has posted a screenshot of the fake log-in page.

MySpace's "seemingly random tendency" to expire user sessions or log out users makes it less noticeable to victims that an attack is under way,

according to a November 16 advisory by the Computer Academic Underground.

Additionally, the worm places an embedded QuickTime movie on the user's profile, which will then repeat the infection process for anyone who visits the profile.

The worm has another malicious function. Once a profile is infected, the worm sends spam to other people in the user's contact list.

Those spam messages contain a file that appears to be a movie but instead is a link to a pornographic site that also hosts adware from Zango, Boyd said.

Zango, formerly 180 Solutions, settled in November with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission for $3 million because of complaints it didn't properly ask the consent of users before its adware was installed.

Boyd said he's heard anecdotal stories of users removing the worm's JavaScript manually from their profile, but the worm reappears after some time if one of their friend's profiles is infected. Several variants of the worm have also appeared, he said.

While some of the Web sites hosting the malicious QuickTime movie have been taken down, others have appeared, Boyd said.

The Firefox 2.0 browser was flagging some of the bogus log-in sites as phishing sites, Boyd said. However, phishing sites can be active for several hours before they are flagged, he said.

MySpace officials in London couldn't immediately comment Monday morning.

Adobe Reader 8 Available For Download

Adobe Systems has announced the release of Adobe Reader 8, the latest major release of their free Portable Document Format (PDF) readers software for Mac OS X and Windows.

New features in Adobe Reader 8 include support for Adobe Acrobat Connect, an online collaboration service that works using Flash. A new streamlined interface features user-customizable toolbars, and Reader users can fill and submit forms, save data and digitally sign documents. The software also features graphics acceleration on supported systems.

It s the first Intel-native version of Adobe Reader to be released. It s worth noting that the Intel-optimized version is a separate download from its PowerPC counterpart, which may cause some confusion for Mac users and IT personnel who have grown accustomed to Universal binaries, which combine PowerPC and Intel optimizations into a single application.

Adobe Reader 8 is available in English, French, German and Japanese versions. Chinese and Korean releases are coming in early 2007. Available for Mac OS X and windows, Adobe Reader 8 is also coming for Linux, HP/UX, AIX and Solaris operating systems in 2007.

System requirements call for a G3 or better processor, Mac OS X v10.4.3 or later, 128MB RAM, 110MB hard disk drive space and Apple Safari 2.0.2.

ICANN Reviews Revoking Outdated Suffixes

Over the past few years, the Internet has seen new domain names such as ".eu" for Europe and ".travel" for the travel industry. Now, the key oversight agency is looking to get rid of some.

Meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers began accepting public comments this week on how best to revoke outdated suffixes, primarily assigned to countries that no longer exist.

The Soviet Union’s ".su" is the leading candidate for deletion, although the former Yugoslav republics of Serbia and Montenegro are transitioning from ".yu" to their own country codes. A Google search generated millions of ".su" and ".yu" sites.

East Timor now uses ".tl," though about 150,000 sites remain under its older code, ".tp."

Also obsolete is Great Britain’s ".gb," which produced no sites on Google. Britons typically use ".uk" for the United Kingdom.

ICANN assigns country codes based on standards set by the International Organization for Standardization, which in turn takes information from the United Nations.

Conflicts can potentially occur when codes are reassigned.

Czechoslovakia didn’t need ".cs" after it split into the Czech Republic (".cz") and Slovakia (".sk"). Serbia and Montenegro got ".cs" following the breakup of Yugoslavia, before further splitting into Serbia (".rs") and Montenegro (".me").

(In this case, a crisis was averted because Czechoslovakia let go of ".cs" long before it was reassigned, and Serbia and Montenegro never used it before splitting up.)

A few other domains have already disappeared, including East Germany’s ".dd" and Zaire’s ".zr" after the country became the Democratic Republic of the Congo (".cd").

ICANN wants to establish a formal policy and is accepting comments online until Jan. 31. Further deletions will likely take a year or longer to give users time to change.

Reductions in the number of domains, now 265, are likely to be temporary.

ICANN is crafting rules on how to roll out additional domains, including ones in non-English characters.

ICANN also is launching a review of eligibility rules for ".int," a domain reserved for international organizations.

Yahoo Shakes Things Up and Restructures

It’s time for a shake-up at Yahoo. On Tuesday, the search engine announced that key executives will leave its ranks when it restructures itself into three new units at the start of 2007. Daniel Rosensweig, Yahoo’s COO, and Lloyd Braun, head of Yahoo’s media group, will both leave the company. Susan Decker, Yahoo’s current and widely esteemed CFO, will become head of the firm’s new Advertising and Publishing Group.

That group, one of three in Yahoo’s new structure, will attempt to expand Yahoo’s ad revenue through building a network of Web sites, including sites not owned by Yahoo, to display publishers’ ads. Yahoo will seek a new CFO to fill the vacant slot.

The new Audience Group will tend to Yahoo’s core product - its search engine - as well as its news and e-mail sites. The group also will develop mobile content and forays into social networking, where Yahoo has lost ground to sites such as MySpace and YouTube, recently purchased by archrival Google.

Lastly, Yahoo’s Technology Group will run the nuts and bolts behind Yahoo’s Web sites, building platform-wide systems under the direction of Yahoo’s current CTO, Farzad Nazem.

Often a darling among Web companies, Yahoo had a tough run in 2006, losing market share and search traffic to Google and other, more nimble rivals.

"Google’s AdWords and AdSense programs ... have been much more effective at connecting searchers with advertisers," said Carmi Levy, senior analyst with the Info-Tech Research Group. "Yahoo’s offerings have been much less efficient at making that connection, and at raising funds."

According to Levy, Google’s ad revenue far outperforms Yahoo’s, even though both sites enjoy roughly the same traffic. But Yahoo might be able to gain ground with Panama, an upgrade to existing ad programs that lets advertisers target ads and track conversion rates more effectively than prior versions.

"In the long run, it should help Yahoo be more competitive with Google at converting its high-level traffic into revenue," said Levy. "But the market does not have an attention span of years. The market has an attention span of days."

Yahoo also has lost ground among the teens, tweens - and more and more these days, the flood of adults - who pack social-networking sites. According to Yankee Group analyst Jennifer Simpson, an expert in social-networking patterns, the problem is not that Yahoo lacks social networking sites, but that each site is a separate island within Yahoo’s sea of traffic, with few bridges between them.

"They’re all very separate products. They haven’t integrated them into their properties as other companies have done," she said, noting that users of Flickr and del.icio.us - Yahoo’s properties for sharing photos and bookmarks, respectively - have to sign in to each site separately.

Research by The Yankee Group has found that social networkers, who by nature tend to be tech-savvy, don’t like to search far and wide for a service. "The thing that’s interesting about them," said Simpson, "is they do tend to like all things on one page. Certainly you can see that with something like MySpace," she added, whose interface puts everything from

instant messaging to video sharing within easy reach.

Internet Explorer Back in the Game

After seeing its user base eroding to rivals like Firefox and Opera, Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browser might be poised for a rebound, thanks to the new features in its recently released seventh version.

Online reviewers have started to release their impressions of the new browser update, with generally positive comments about the changes.

Notable tweaks include a redesign that swaps menus for task-oriented buttons, a built-in search field, and tabbed browsing. The features are in line with options already available in competing browsers, such as Firefox, reviewers have noted.

Although IE7 had some security problems immediately after its release, reviewers have been complimentary about improvements over the previous IE version. Specifically, the new browser offers built-in security features, such as warnings when Web visitors go to known phishing sites.

Much like the search field and tabbed-browsing capability, this particular security feature is also available in the latest version of Firefox. Opera plans to include a similar technology when it releases Opera 9.1, expected to arrive in late December.

IE7 does have some unique features as well, including the ability to view thumbnail-size versions of open pages.

Although Internet Explorer has lost some users to rival browsers, it is still the dominant player in the field, and used by the majority of Internet surfers, noted Gartner analyst Michael Silver, who issued an early report on the browser with fellow analysts Ray Valdes and Neil MacDonald.

Part of the reason is that Internet Explorer is built into Windows, making it a default browser for many users, who simply do not have the interest or tech savvy to download an alternative version.

For more advanced users, IE7 could keep them from straying toward Firefox or other browsers, although even with new features, the updated browser is not expected to win back many users that have gone to alternative browsers, Silver added.

The update could come just in time for enterprise plans, because many I.T. departments have been pondering a switch to non-IE browsers.

"Within some organizations, a near-majority of the most technically adept individuals chose to use alternatives like Firefox and Opera," Silver noted. "We believe features included in IE7 will likely be sufficient to convince I.T. managers that have been considering a change to a non-IE browser to reconsider."

Disabled Deprived Of Access To Many Top Web Sites

Many Web sites around the world are beyond the reach of disabled persons but could easily be improved to meet international accessibility standards, a survey commissioned by the United Nations found on Tuesday.

The study, conducted for the world body by British technology firm Nomensa, looked at 100 popular sites in 20 countries and found the vast majority failed to meet international standards of accessibility.

"We've clearly got some obstacles to overcome," Nomensa's Leonie Watson, who is blind, told a news conference at U.N. headquarters.

While many sites have taken steps toward wider accessibility, they need to do more to become fully available to people who cannot use a computer mouse, have low-vision disabilities or are blind, she said.

Among the most common problems encountered in the survey were the use of a common scripting language called JavaScript and of graphics unaccompanied by explanatory text, she said.

A heavy reliance on JavaScript makes it impossible for about 10 percent of Internet users to access key information because they lack the needed software to do so, she said.

Textual descriptions of graphics enable individuals who are blind to "see" them by using screen reader software that converts the text into electronic speech, she said.

Another problem turned up by the survey was the use of poorly contrasting color combinations, making Web pages difficult to read for people with mild visual impairment like color blindness.

The survey looked at popular travel, finance, media, government and retail sites in countries with relatively well-developed Internet infrastructure.

The study found that three of the 100 sites evaluated met the basic accessibility criteria - those of the German chancellor (http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de), the Spanish government (http://www.la-moncloa.es/default.htm) and the British prime minister (http://www.primeminister.gov.uk).

Half of American Business PCs Can't Run Vista

About half of the average business PCs in North America are unable to meet the minimum requirements for Microsoft's Windows Vista operating system, while 94 percent do not meet the system requirements for Vista Premium.

Within these figures, 41 percent and 78 percent, respectively, require RAM upgrades to meet the minimum and premium system requirements of Vista, says a new study by Softchoice Research, which is expected to be released later this week.

In comparison, when Windows XP was released, some 71 percent of the PCs met its system requirements, Softchoice services consultant Dean Williams said in an executive summary of the report.

"At the time of release 71 percent of the PCs met the system requirements

for Windows XP, whereas only 50 percent of the PCs included in this study meet the minimum requirements to run Windows Vista. This difference suggests that jump in system requirements to run Vista presents a significant barrier to adoption," he said.

The inventory data used in the study represents a total of 112,113 desktops from 472 North American organizations in the financial, health care, technology, education and manufacturing sectors.

Twelve percent of the PCs surveyed will require CPU replacements to run Vista in its minimum configuration, while 16 percent will require CPU replacements to run Vista in its premium configuration, William said.

Vista's minimum CPU requirements have increased 243 percent from those of Windows XP, which in turn had a much smaller increase of 75 percent from Windows 2000's CPU requirements.

"Ultimately, the rate at which the average business CPU's MHz rating is increasing has not kept pace with Vista: The CPU requirements for Vista have increased 243 percent from those of Windows XP, whereas the speed of the average business PC's CPU has only increased by 215 percent over roughly the same time period," Williams said.

Williams attributes the poor state of hardware readiness among North American companies to the sharp increase in the hardware resources required to run Vista; the fact that many organizations are maintaining longer hardware refresh cycles where they support PCs for more than five years; and a lack of easy access to the PC inventory information needed to implement an effective life cycle management process.

"Most organizations planning to deploy Vista within the next two years will have a PC life cycle that is affected by these factors, which, taken together, present a significant operational and financial stumbling block if not planned for well ahead of time," he said.

Preliminary user surveys suggest that 27 percent of organizations are planning to wait one to two years before undertaking a Vista rollout, with some 33 percent planning to wait between six months and one year.

"While these findings suggest that many organizations are considering a longer-term deployment schedule, the hardware purchasing decisions made today will undoubtedly impact the viability of a Vista rollout in the coming years," Williams said.

Microsoft estimates that 20 percent of PCs will be running Vista within the first year of its release, double the rate at which XP was adopted in the first year it was made available to the market, he said.

Microsoft has said it expects 10 times more seats of Vista to be deployed at launch, with deployment within the first year being twice as fast as that for any other version.

But Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, who headlined the business launch of Vista, Office 2007 and Exchange 2007 at an event at the NASDAQ stock exchange late last week, is upbeat about the products and said customers will buy them.

In an interview with eWEEK after the event, Ballmer acknowledged that most people will upgrade when they replace their hardware, but he also predicted that some will accelerate their hardware upgrade cycle.

Ballmer also sent out an executive e-mail to customers last week in which he acknowledged that with the "dramatic" changes to the user experience, from the new Vista Aero interface to the new Ribbon in the 2007 Office system, "comes more than a little risk."

"After all, these are some of the best-known and most-used products on the planet. Windows powers 845 million computers. Office is used by more than 450 million people. Any thoughtful businessperson would think twice before tinkering with the products that people use every day to manage their work and run their businesses," he said.

What is the business case for upgrading to Vista?

"So why are we making these changes? And why should you risk disrupting your business to take advantage of these new features and capabilities?" he questioned.

The answer: because business has changed and new tools are required. No one questions the competitive advantages that come from the ability to communicate and collaborate instantly with colleagues and customers around the world. No one doubts that businesses benefit from access to nearly limitless information about customers, competitors, and markets, Ballmer said.

"But, at the same time, no one labors under the illusion that business is any easier as a result. In today's global economy, where customers can find the best price without leaving their desks, competitive advantage can come and go in the blink of an eye," he said.

Microsoft is also poised to introduce over the next year new innovations such as unified communications, including VOIP (voice over IP), and performance management that utilizes cutting-edge analytics and business intelligence, which would enable businesses to achieve new levels of value from their information technology investments, Ballmer said.

"Over the course of the next decade, we expect that Windows Vista, the 2007 Office system and Exchange Server 2007 will be used by well beyond 1 billion people. ... The future of business computing begins today, we look forward to the new ideas, the new businesses and the new innovations that will result," he said.

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